WILEY

A new social media initiative helped to boost organ donor registration rates, according to a new study published in the *American Journal of Transplantation*. The findings suggest that social media might be an effective tool for tackling a variety of problems related to public health in which communication and education are essential.

Organ donation rates in the United States have remained static while increasing numbers of individuals join transplant waiting lists each year. To provide organs to the more than 100,000 patients in need, new efforts to boost organ donation through public education are clearly needed.

Andrew Cameron, MD, PhD, of The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, and his colleagues wondered whether social media could be used to reach more of the population and motivate them to become donors upon their death. Collaborating with Facebook, the Timeline platform on the social media site was altered to let users change their profile status to

indicate “organ donor.” When they did so, they were given a link to their official state donor registry, and a message was sent to their friends informing them of their new status. Their friends then had the opportunity to change their own status as well and to keep the message going.

When the investigators looked at the online registration activity in state registries for the weeks following Facebook's organ donor initiative, they saw a large spike in donor registration in all states. On the first day of the initiative, there were

13,054 new online registrations, representing a 21.1-fold increase over the baseline average of 616 registrations. This first-day effect ranged from 6.9-fold in Michigan to 108.9-fold in Georgia. Registration rates remained elevated

in the following 12 days.

“Our research speaks to on-going efforts to address the organ availability crisis in

the United States. It also suggests that social media and social networks may be valuable tools in re-approaching refractory public health problems," said Dr. Cameron.

“However, the bump we saw did diminish over weeks, implying that more work is needed to assure sustainability or ‘virality’ in this case.” He added

that the long-term significance of this work will be realized only when the use of social media and social networks is examined in terms of its impact on the

nation’s organ supply.